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SHASTA MYTHS ¹

BY ROLAND B. DIXON

32. URUTSMAXIG

THERE was a trail which went up the river on the other side. There was a ford; and a house stood on this side, just below the ford. People coming up river had to wade across to this side at the ford. Just as they were in the middle, the man who lived in the house would jump out, go down towards the bank, take a hooked pole, and catch the traveller. Then he would drown him. That was the way it was formerly, and the people who had been thus drowned were piled up in heaps along the bank.

A traveller came along the trail. He said, "I will go and buy a wife." He came to the place where the evil being lived, and saw the piles of drowned persons scattered along the shore. He had heard people say that if one waded across, he was tripped up and drowned; that all were so drowned that the evil being saw. The man wondered where the crossing was, as he went on. Then he saw the house opposite; the door was open. Then the trail led down into the river. "This is the place," he thought. "This is the place they speak of. Here is where every one is drowned who crosses." He went on, and thought what he should do. He started to wade over; he got half-way across. Then the evil being in the house looked out. "Who is that?" he said, and jumped out through the door. He ran down to the river-bank and picked up the hooked pole. He reached out and caught the traveller by the leg; but he kept on wading over. The one with the hook pulled hard to trip him up, but not at all could he trip him. So the traveller came across. "What are you trying to do to me?" he said. Then he reached out, and seized the evil being who tripped people up, and took away from him the hooked pole. He broke it to pieces, and threw them into the river. The evil being who tripped people up stood very still. He was surprised that the other should take the pole and break it up. Then the traveller seized the evil being, lifted him up, and threw him into the river. "I am a supernatural being, but you are not. You will be a newt, not a supernatural person." So he killed him at last, and he was drowned.

The name of the traveller was Urutsmaxig. He went on up the river. He had concealed with him Maiyaho (one name for the Cotton-tail Rabbit), who gave him advice. He saw a house on the opposite side of the river. "I wonder who lives there!" he said. When he came opposite the house, he saw piles of dead persons lying by the trail.

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"What is the trouble with them, I wonder!" he said. "What could have killed them all!" He noticed that the door of the house on the other side was open. Now, while he thought this, the people in the house said to the person living there, "There is a chief passing along over there. Do not look across at him." But the person got up anyhow to look across, and the people seized him to prevent his looking. "It is a chief who is passing," they said. The evil person tried to pull loose from them, and said, "What is a chief? I am a supernatural person myself." Then he got loose, and went to the door, and looked across. He winked, opening and shutting his eyes, for in this way he killed people. But Urutsmaxig still went on. Again the evil being winked, opening and shutting his eyes, and still Urutsmaxig went on. Then Urutsmaxig put his hand into his sack, and took out a bundle of flints. The evil being kept winking, winked repeatedly and long, but Urutsmaxig went on just the same. Then he tossed a handful of flints across, threw them into the evil being's eyes, and at once he fell over backward into the house. His head fell into the fire. The people seized him. "I told you not to look," they said. Then they pulled him out of the fire, and rubbed the fire out, rubbing off his hair and much of his skin too. When Urutsmaxig threw the flints across, he said, "You will be Buzzard, not a supernatural person." The people said, "We told you not to look across. We said it was a chief who was passing." Then the person sat still there, with his back to the fire.

Now, Urutsmaxig went on, to buy his wife. He arrived at the place. He came to where an old woman lived who had two daughters. He stayed there for a few days; and then the old woman said, "M-m-m-m! My son-in-law, I wish you would go and stand there, where the deer run. I will go and rattle deer-bones, and drive them toward you." — "All right!" he said, and got ready and went. The old woman went with him, and showed him where to stand. "Stand there," she said, "and I will drive the deer to you. Don't miss them, for I am hungry for meat." So he went there, and stood. When he was out of sight, the old woman went back to the house. She went to the place where she kept things hidden, and took out her gambling-sticks. She gambled, and thought she had killed her son-in-law. Urutsmaxig stood where she had told him. Below was a great rattlesnake. The old woman had told him to stand there for that reason. It was so that the rattlesnake might swallow him. That was why she gambled, she was happy, and she thought, "Now by this time the rattlesnake has swallowed him." Urutsmaxig stood there, and thought, "Where is the old woman going to drive?" and while he thought this, while he wondered where she was driving, the rattlesnake breathed in. Now, where Urutsmaxig stood there were many trees; and when the rattlesnake opened its mouth, they all leaned toward it, drawn by the wind.

Urutsmaxig was drawn along. He seized the trees, but they were pulled up by the roots. He was drawn down towards the rattlesnake's mouth. He thought, "I am going to die." Then he braced himself, but his feet slipped; he was sunk into the ground up to his knees, but could not hold. Then he thought of the spare flint-flakes he had tied up in his quiver. He reached in, took them out, and just as the rattlesnake was swallowing him, he threw the flints into the open mouth. So he killed the rattlesnake, and cut off the head, and took it away.

He returned to the house, and put down his game at the door. This made a noise. The old woman was gambling as he walked in, and she quickly threw her gambling-sticks over her back toward the wall. "It is outside," he said. "Yes," said she, "I'll eat outside." Then she went out. Urutsmaxig had killed one of the old woman's relatives. She had said she would eat outside, but she wailed and cried. Then she buried it, and came back again after a time.

By and by she said, "Son-in-law, go down to the river! There is a salmon-trap there, inherited from one who is dead. I want some fish, any kind of fish." So he went down. There were many fish in the trap, and he reached down to take some out. Then rattlesnakes stuck their heads out of the water, and he nearly was bitten. Then he killed them with his arrow-flaker, and tied them up in bunches, and took them off. As soon as he had left, the old woman had begun to gamble. When she heard Urutsmaxig at the door, she threw her gambling-sticks away. "I have brought them, old woman!" said Urutsmaxig. Then she said, "Yes, I'll eat outside." So she went out and cried.

By and by she said, "Son-in-law, I wish you would go there and climb up to that eagle's nest. It is on a tree. Take the young birds. They will soon be flying." — "All right!" said he. So he went. "Where is this man?" he thought. After a while he saw a juniper. It was bushy, and there was an eagle's nest in it. He climbed up after the nest, and kept on climbing. As he climbed, the tree grew up with him, until it reached the sky. Finally he reached the nest, and looked over the edge into it. And there were rattlesnakes in it. They coiled and struck at him, and almost bit him. He took out his arrow-flaker, and struck them on the head, and killed them. He tied them in a bunch, and stood on the top of the tree. He pressed it down with his foot, then he climbed down again, and went back to the house, carrying the game. The old woman had been gambling ever since Urutsmaxig had gone. She thought, "By now he is killed, in spite of his coming back before." Then, just as she was thinking this, he came in. "I left it outside, old woman!" he said. "Yes," said she, "I'll pluck them outside." So she went out. She wailed and cried, and then buried them. He was killing those who had been her relatives.

After a time she said, "Son-in-law, I want to eat spawning salmon."

—“All right!” said he. She told him which one she wanted. “Spear the one that floats down blue in color. Do not take the one that is red, but the one that floats down blue.” So he went, and took with him Maiyaho, the little one. He arrived at the place where the old woman had told him to go. He undressed. He had a skin about his waist only. He tied his hair up in a bunch on top of his head, and put eagle-down on it. He took out his spear, tipped with black obsidian and with red and black obsidian, a two-pronged spear. He put on the points. Then he told Maiyaho what to do. “Do not cry,” he said, “if I am pulled into the water. I will stick this arrow-flaker in the bank. Do not touch it. If it falls, you may cry; and then after ten days you come here.” So he stood watching. Now, the red salmon floated down, but he did not spear it. Then a blue one floated down, and he speared it under the arm. It jumped and roared in the water. When it jumped and flopped about, it nearly pulled Urutsmaxig into the stream. He pulled the salmon out, and then it pulled him into the stream, pulled him wholly in, until he was out of sight; even the eagle-down did not come up. Then Maiyaho cried, he whom Urutsmaxig had told not to cry. He did not return until after dark to the house. Next morning he went away right after breakfast, and did not come back until night. For all the ten days he did this. He watched the arrow-flaker; but still it stood up, and did not fall. Urutsmaxig had said that unless it fell, he was not to cry; yet he cried every day. The tenth day came, and Maiyaho watched. It was the same time that Urutsmaxig had been pulled in. The water rippled from an unseen cause. Maiyaho wiped the tears from his eyes, and thought, “I wonder if I did not see something!” Again he saw it. Then the eagle-down appeared above the water; then Urutsmaxig came up out of the water as far as his shoulders; then he came fully out. He pulled out the thing he had speared. It was worth looking at, for it had a person’s body and a fish’s tail. Urutsmaxig carried it off. He said to Maiyaho, “I told you not to cry until the arrow-flaker should fall.” Then they went back with the head. Maiyaho told him, “The old woman has been gambling all the time. She did not even eat.” When they got back, they made a noise at the door, and the old woman threw her gambling-sticks over her back to the wall. They came in. “I have come back with the fish,” said Urutsmaxig. “Yes, I’ll cut it up outside,” said she. Instead of this she buried it; for it was the head of the old woman’s daughter he had brought. It was that she buried.

Now she could do nothing to him. She thought, “What way can I kill him?” Then she said, “Son-in-law, don’t you feel like playing?” —“Yes,” said he, “I don’t care what the game is. Let us go!” So they went. So they got to the place where people swing and sway on a tree. The tree stuck out far over the water of a lake. It was

a fearful sight. Now they walked out on the tree to play. They bent it down by standing on the end of it. Then the old woman jumped off. It sprang up until it struck the sky, then bent back and sunk deep under the water. By and by it came up, and Urutsmaxig was still standing there on the end. "Now, old woman, it is your turn," he said. So he bent it down for her, and jumped off. Just as before, the pole sprang up to the sky, then sprang back under the water; and when it came up again, the old woman was gone. "Where is she?" thought Urutsmaxig. Then far up in the sky she laughed, "He, he, he! You did good to me, my son-in-law. I shall see what people do at night. If they steal anything, I shall be the one who sees." So she became the moon. And Urutsmaxig went on to his home. It was that way that he did in the olden time, they say.

33. THE RACE WITH THUNDER

Thunder and Silver-Fox lived side by side. They bet with each other, saying, "Let's run a race!" So they ran, and Silver-Fox was beaten. Then Thunder bet again, with another, with Red-Fox, and won. There were ten brothers of them; and next Black-Fox ran, and was beaten. Then they talked together, and said, "Whom can we hire?" — "Whom else than Wolf?" said one. "Yes," said they. So one went at night to tell Wolf to come that night.

He arrived. "Ha!" said he, "what is the trouble?" Then Silver-Fox said to him, "Take pity on me! Thunder has won all I have. They are racing now, and three have been beaten." — "Well," said Wolf, "what can I do to win? I think I will go and look on, at any rate." So they went at dawn. They hid Wolf, and as it grew light they told him about things. "This is what he does to us, this is how he beats us. He almost kills us. He runs in front of us, and tears up the ground. That is the reason he wins." So they told him about it. "Ah!" said Wolf, "what can I do? I will try, anyway."

Now, the sun was just rising. It rose, it rose higher, and now they began to race. Wolf prayed for luck while he was running. They started; and soon Thunder tore up the ground, he tore open trees, he ploughed up the earth ahead of Wolf. Wolf kept praying silently. He was running behind Thunder, and he turned in and ran directly in line behind him. He pulled a Pain from his tongue, and threw it ahead, so as to strike the ground where Thunder was to run. When Thunder came to the spot, it seemed as if he stood still, so fast did Wolf pass him, and win. So they won back all that Thunder had won away from them. That was the way they raced. That Wolf was the only one who could beat him. No others could do it. That is how they did when Thunder bet and won.

34. COYOTE AND THE CANNIBAL

Long ago an evil being was travelling about, travelling around in the world to eat people. After a while, he came into this country; he came up river. The people heard of him, heard that a "devil" was coming who ate people, and they fled to the mountains. By and by Coyote said, "What is this 'devil' you are talking about? I myself am a 'devil.' By and by we two will eat of each other. Now do ye all run away. I will sit here, and by and by we two will taste of each other." So they did. Coyote got pitch, he pounded up a plant and mixed it with the pitch. He plastered it then on his breast and belly, that it might be what the "devil" should taste of. Then he sat down. Far away from the fire, in the corner, Badger was hidden.

Now the one who came approached, saying, "Tatcīdidi kŭp kŭp kŭp." — "Now he is coming," said Coyote to Badger. "Don't get excited. When I taste, I will quickly cut out his heart. Then I will jump out of the house. Do you then quickly run out from where you are hidden, and open out the coals in the fire. I will run around the house, then I will jump up on the roof, and will throw the heart into the fire. Then do you quickly cover it up with the coals." — "All right!" said Badger.

Now the cannibal came close. "Tatcīdidi kŭp kŭp kŭp" is what he said. Now Coyote answered, "Tatcīdidi kŭp kŭp kŭp." Then the "devil" thought as he went, "They never said that to me before. Nowhere did they say that." Then he arrived. "Hē!" said Coyote. "I am hungry. There was no one here to eat when I came." — "Ho!" said the "devil." "I came this way also. I too am hungry." Then Coyote said, "Let us eat each other!" — "All right!" said the "devil." "Yes," said Coyote, "do you eat me first. Let us begin." So Coyote started up the fire. Then he pulled open his shirt. "Cut with this knife right here, on the breast," said he. "All right!" said the cannibal. So he cut a slice off of Coyote's breast. He roasted it. Then the "devil" took off the fire what he had cut from Coyote's breast, and ate it. "Ah!" said he, "your flesh is bitter." — "Yes," said Coyote, "it is because people have been talking about me." The other could hardly eat it, but he finished it at last. Then Coyote said to the "devil," "I'll taste you now." — "All right!" said he. So he uncovered himself. Then Coyote took the knife to slice the "devil's" breast; but instead of that, he cut inwards deeply, he cut in towards the heart and lungs, he cut down to the bone. "Ahaha!" said the "devil," "a little higher. Don't cut so deep!" Coyote kept on cutting close to the bone; and when he got to the end of the breast-bone, he cut in deep. He cut quickly, and cut out the heart and lungs. Then, taking them, he jumped out of the house through the door, and ran

around the house. He ran round and round. The "devil" ran after him, he chased him. Then the Badger jumped out quickly, he opened out the coals of the fire. Coyote ran around the house several times, carrying the heart and lungs. Then he jumped on the roof, and threw the heart and all through the smoke-hole into the fire. Badger covered them up quickly with the coals. Then the heart popped and burst, and the "devil" fell dead. That is what it did when Badger covered it with coals. That is how Coyote killed that "devil." When the heart popped, people heard it all over the world. Then they said, "Coyote has killed that 'devil.'"

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